

Epitome of Eighteen Histories 6: Awakusu Akane

Episode

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Awakusu Akane Episode

This is a story of the future.
A story of twisted future.



On the spring of Awakusu Akane's first year of high school. A few days had passed since her entrance to Raira Academy, but just when she thought she was getting used to her new school, it came. She was about to go out to bask in the sunlight filtering through the spring trees, when suddenly a shadow cut in front of her, and she realised that a girl was standing in front of her.

"Your family is the Awakusu-kai, isn't it?"

Akane startled at the girl's somewhat provocative tone.

Awakusu Akane's grandfather was a criminal heading the organisation known as the Awakusu-kai.

His son Awakusu Mikiya, Akane's father, was the Young Head, making it a two-generation family business.

Many things had been whispered of her heritage, and although it had troubled Akane at one point, meeting someone in her elementary school days had allowed her to overcome those worries, and she was now able to live her days without being too bothered about such things. However, this was the very first time anyone had confronted her upfront about it.

"I was able to hold back till now, but today I can't, so listen up."

"..."

Rather than becoming offended or sad, it seemed Akane's curiosity about the girl had won out, for she only tilted her head and stared at the girl's face.

The girl was glaring at her, and did not look away.

One minute.

Two minutes.

When three minutes passed, she whimpered, and, flushing, said,
“W, what! Why are you glaring at me?! I won’t be scared of you!”

Akane had no memory of glaring whatsoever.

But apparently staring expressionlessly had been more pressurising than intended.

Akane became even more puzzled as the girl’s face began to wobble and she grew teary.

She’s like a child.

This was what Akane thought.

In her own childhood she had been quick to tears, had been easily shocked and emotional, but now that she was in her first year of high school naturally she had developed some composure.

It was possibly the product of learning bōjutsu at Rakuei Gym, which she attended even now.

In truth, amongst her age group, one could well consider Akane to be on the level-headed side.

And so from her perspective, her categorisation of this girl, who had picked a fight for no reason and proceeded to cry for no reason, was in fact, ‘That’s kind of cute.’

Since it was their first meeting, Akane was going to ask for her name at the very least—but the girl pointed at her fiercely and cried,

“Whatever you’re going to say, I won’t listen!”

And the girl left.

The other students present were equally puzzled, but none reacted strangely to Akane; perhaps they were not well-acquainted with the Awakusu-kai, or were pretending not to know because they were fearful or being sensitive towards Akane.

Akane eventually came back to herself fully, and wondered,

“Who on earth... was that?”



A few days later.

When Akane passed by the gym storeroom after school, she came on a scene of bullying.

“Hey, always butting into things, acting all high and mighty, it’s gross, do you even realise?”

A group of gyaru-style students were cornering a girl behind the gym storeroom. The victim was a girl with her black hair tied back —the same girl who had suddenly approached Akane a few days prior.

“D, does that matter? You’re the ones who skipped school, you’re in the wrong!” Her words bespoke bravado, but already she looked close to tears.

“Who do you think you are?”

The gyaru threw the softball in her hand towards the girl’s body.

“Ugu.”

The girl curled her body in pain.

“S, stop it.”

“Huh? Why? We’re just having softball training.”

“Though we’re not in softball. Ha.”

As they said this, the other girls began throwing softballs as well.

Naturally, unable to ignore this, Akane spoke up.

“What are you doing?”

There was no hint of fear in her voice.

She could not pretend she never saw anything.

This trait alone had remained unchanged since her childhood.

Of course in her elementary school days her voice would be shaking with the effort of mustering all of her courage, but now she had trained both mind and body she was able to speak unwaveringly.

“...Who the hell are you? It’s none of your business.”

From the point of view of the gyaru’s, a seemingly timid girl had stepped in by herself to interfere with them.

Seeing as they were bullying the girl with the ponytail for being self-righteous, Akane’s intervention was probably equally unwelcome.

Without warning, one of their number threw a softball at her.

“ ... ”

Akane caught the ball bare-handed.

“ ... ”

The girls gaped for a moment, but probably thinking that leaving things as they were would cause them to lose face, they began to throw the softballs scattered on the floor at her.

But Akane, her expression unchanging, dealt with every ball impeccably, whether by catching or dodging them, or even stepping on the ball.

To her, an exercise like this was a daily routine at her dojo.

There she handled hardballs from multiple directions to hone her ability to track moving objects. Compared to the hardballs thrown at high speed by her mentor, these sluggish softballs were merely slightly bigger and nothing to be afraid of at all.

“...tch! We’re going! What a downer.”

“Ugh~! You busybodies can get along, baldy!”

After spitting at Akane the completely incongruous insult of ‘baldy’, they tsked and left.

Akane coldly watched their backs as they left, before she turned back to the girl with the ponytail and extended her hand.

“...Are you okay?”

“T, thank...”

The girl about to thank Akane saw her face, and suddenly realised who it was. Then she glared at Akane, and tried to bat her hand away.

“I didn’t ask for h... elp...?”

She had swiped her hand at Akane’s to brush it away, but Akane grabbed that hand firmly.

“L, let go. I don’t need help from the Awakusu-kai!”

“Tell me.”

Akane said, quiet but intense.

The key to understanding an opponent who was not receptive to one’s advances was to find out that person’s goal.

Akane, remembering how her instructor had said this, had decided to start by asking this.

In truth, after saying that her instructor had said, ‘Once you know their goal, you can create an opening or launch a counter at your leisure. After that it becomes a one-sided offence.’ But Akane chose not to remember that part.

“Huh...? Tell you... tell you what?”

“What... should I have done back there, then...?”

“...!”

“Should I have abandoned you? Seeing another person get bullied, should I... have pretended I saw nothing?”

Akane asked troubledly. The girl with the ponytail stiffened—

And after a few seconds, she began to shake her head, tears spilling from her eyes.

“I, I don’t know, how would I... I wouldn’t... know...”

A few minutes later.

Akane, sitting on the lawn beside the shed, had comforted the sobbing girl. What she learnt as a result—was that apparently, the girl had heard rumours about Akane from a middle school classmate who had attended the same elementary school as Akane.

“B, but... She said, ‘Awakusu Akane-chan’s family is the Awakusu-kai, so all our parents told us we couldn’t oppose her, so we had no choice’... And she said she could only go along with everything you said, too...”

After hearing the full story, Akane sighed deeply.

While it made her remember the sense of loss she had had as an elementary schooler, she held no animosity towards the girl before her.

In fact, she was just a little happy.

Even if it was a misunderstanding, at the very least the girl before her had spoken her true feelings to Akane’s face, regardless of her parentage.

That was why Akane chose to speak of it.

Of her past.

From way back, when she first stopped that case of bullying—to when she discovered her family’s true line of work, and even about how, afterwards, her relationship with her family had grown strained for a time.

The girl with the ponytail listened on quietly, her frame shaking like she had undergone a great shock.

And the moment Akane finished, she began to cry again.

—It’s like there’s an endless well.

Akane thought this even as she hurriedly lent her handkerchief.

The girl, sobbing, started apologising to Akane so profusely it seemed she might go down on her knees any moment.

“Ugu... Higu... I, I’m... sorry... I was mean... I misunderstood... you... and hurt you...”

After yet another few minutes of pacifying.

The girl, having finally calmed down, was now apologising with a glum expression.

“I’m really sorry... You... must hate me. I attacked you on a misunderstanding, and when you helped me I lashed out again...”

“You shouldn’t blame yourself.”

Akane tried to be encouraging. But the girl looked into the distance, and whispered softly,

“I want to be stronger... But I don’t even know where to start...”

After some thought, Akane took her smartphone out from her bag, and showed the girl the project gallery of a magazine’s mobile site.

“This is one of the people I respect.”

‘Kinomiya Kazane’s World Wonders Challenge!’, said the words on the screen. It seemed this person investigated urban legends from across the world: visiting old castles where ghosts were said to appear, going all the way to an island north of Germany in search of vampires, then all the way to New York following a rumoured gang of immortals, interviewing the illegal denizens of the abandoned construction Etsusa Bridge, and essentially actively involving herself in a gamut of things that looked terrifying.

“This Kinomiya Kazane tried to launch a surprise interview on one of our... one of the Awakusu-kai’s scary people. I happened to meet her back then... When I asked if she wasn’t scared... what do you think she said?”

“...I don’t know.”

“She said, ‘It’s scary, but leaving these people unknown is even scarier. It’s fine if you know something’s dangerous and put yourself on guard, but continuing to fear something while knowing nothing of it is the scariest of all.’ I thought what she said made sense, so...”

As she was saying this, they saw a group of seven, girls and boys, heading towards them.

On a closer inspection, it was the girls who had thrown the softballs earlier, and they had brought along a few delinquent-looking boys.

“Hey, is it them? The ones you said don’t know their place?”

It was a boy with brown hair and a bat in his hand, chewing gum noisily.

Unlike back when it was known as Raijin High, Raira Academy had in recent years grown a reputation for being a rich kids' school. As such, even the delinquents of the school were not very intimidating.

To this joke of a delinquent, one of the *gyaru*'s said,

"Yeah, Satoshi~. These girls don't know their place, scare them a little for us?"

The group smiled maliciously, looking towards them.

Likely they intended to gang up and beat them up.

They were overwhelmingly outnumbered, but inside, Akane was strangely calm.

—It's not scary.

—If you compare to back then. This is nothing.

The memory of being kidnapped and forced onto a truck came back to her.

Along with that of the man in the bartender suit who had saved her.

—These people... compared to Shizuo-san's strength, they're nothing.

If said people were to have heard her inner thoughts, they would probably cry out that comparing them to Ikebukuro's Automatic Fighting Doll was too brutal, but this meant nothing to Akane.

Clueless to the mental comparison going on about them, the delinquents smirked evilly.

"Hah! Sorry if you piss yourselves, but I'll have to show you just what happens to people talking back to my girlfriend, up close and personal with this bat..."

In the time it took for the boy to thrust his bat at them and start talking, Akane was already moving.

By grabbing the fat end of the bat and twisting, due to the lever effect, a great force was exerted on the boy's hand on the narrow end.

Making the most of it, Akane spun her body while drawing the bat towards herself with her arm, and wrenching on the thick end of the bat, effectively repossessed the bat.

"Ah?! Hah?!"

The momentum caused the boy, still shocked, to fall over.

Following that Akane gripped the bat in a stance meant for her staff, and stabbed it towards the boy's face, as if to smash it in with the end of the bat.

"Uboahh?!"

The boy screamed, tears springing to his eyes.

Akane, having halted the bat right before it hit his nose, smiled sweetly, and said to the students before her,

“You shouldn’t use bats to hit people. It’s bad, you know?”

At the sight of Akane’s angelic smile, the seven students blanched and fled.

The girl with the ponytail, watching on stunned, said,

“Wow... How did you do that?”

Akane turned to the girl.

“You want to know?”

“...Yeah.”

“Then I’ll teach you. I can introduce you to my teacher too.”

“Really?! Thank you!”

The girl, finally recovering her smile, extended her hand towards Akane, and wiping away her tears, smiled.

“I’m... Kuzuhara Tōka. Please take care of me.”

In the days to come, they would grow to be best friends in spite of their family backgrounds, and this relationship would cause one another to be involved in trouble numerous times—but that is another story.

And no matter how many times they were embroiled in chaos, their friendship would endure—Tōka would afterwards overcome her timidity, and become feared alongside Akane as ‘The Demon Staff-Users, *STICK WITCHES*’—but that is another story.



On an unrelated note, when the seven boys and girls were shadowing Akane for a chance to take their revenge:

“Oi, kids over there? Come with us and let’s talk about what you were going to do to that girl, huh?”

They were led away by the Awakusu-kai, and withdrew from the school within the next few days—

But that too is another story.



This is a twisted story.

The story of a twisted future.

****EPISODE END****

*Tōka/Touka: 'Orange Flower'. (Orange meaning either the fruit or the colour or both.)